

Overview of Implementation Procedures Rehabilitation of Aging Watershed Dams

Public Law 106-472, “The Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000” authorizes the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to assist watershed project sponsors with rehabilitation of dams near, at, or past their evaluated life expectancy. The Act defines “rehabilitation” as the completion of all work necessary to extend the service life of the dams and meet applicable safety and performance standards. At the completion of a rehabilitation project, the dam will meet all current standards and will function for another 50 to 100 years. The following are the primary steps involved in the development and implementation of a rehabilitation plan:

- ◆ **Assessment of existing dams:** Project sponsors may request NRCS to conduct an assessment of specific dams to determine project viability. NRCS conducts a preliminary study.
 - ◆ **Formal application:** An application is submitted by project sponsors for rehabilitation of specific dams. Sponsors must be “ready, willing, and able” to handle their responsibilities (local cost-share, landrights, downstream controls on development, long-term operation and maintenance, etc).
 - ◆ **Ranking of Applications:** NRCS conducts an evaluation of the existing dam using uniform procedures (see next page). A priority ranking for each viable application is assigned. The State Dam Safety Agency provides input into this evaluation process.
 - ◆ **Selection and funding of projects:** NRCS allocates funds for technical assistance for planning of selected rehabilitation projects.
 - ◆ **Planning of selected rehabilitation projects:** Planning is completed using established procedures for watershed planning.
- Minimum alternatives to be considered include: no action, decommissioning, rehabilitation to meet current criteria, and the National Economic Development Plan. Also, nonstructural alternatives will be considered as appropriate (relocation of residences, easements or other controls on downstream development, etc.).
- Impacts of each alternative are evaluated.
- ◆ **Approval and Authorization:** NRCS approves the rehabilitation plan. The Chief of NRCS must authorize all rehabilitation plans prior to implementation.
 - ◆ **Design and Construction:** Funds appropriated by Congress for financial assistance and technical assistance funds are provided for implementation of specific rehabilitation plans. Designs must meet all current NRCS and state dam criteria.
 - ◆ **Operation and Maintenance:** Sponsors are responsible for operation and maintenance for the new planned life of the rehabilitation projects (generally 50 to 100 years).

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How the Priority Ranking Process Works

It is anticipated that the number of requests for NRCS assistance for rehabilitation will greatly exceed the funds available. A priority ranking process will be used to provide a consistent method of evaluation of dams.

All viable applications received from project sponsors will be ranked. The priority ranking system includes three major components:

A. Potential for failure of the dam.

B. Consequences of failure of the dam.

C. Input from State Dam Safety Agency.

A. Potential for a failure of the dam: This component evaluates possible causes of dam failure. The process results in computation of a failure index. The higher the index value, the higher the potential for dam failure.

B. Consequences of failure of the dam: This component evaluates the impacts a failure of the dam would have on a community and the environment. It considers possible consequences, such as loss of life, loss of water supply; damage to transportation systems, impacts on the environment (threatened and endangered species, sensitive riparian areas, contaminated sediment, critical wetland and wildlife habitat, etc.), adverse impacts on cultural resources, historic preservation and adverse economic impacts due to loss of flood control.

C. Input and Comments: Input and comments from State Dam Safety Officials and others are considered during the evaluation of the projects.

Priority Ranking Assigned: After the dam failure index is determined, the consequences of failure are evaluated, and other applicable input is considered, the NRCS State Conservationist assigns a priority ranking for each dam for consideration in allocation of funding for planning, design and construction.

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